

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 129  
By Bowers

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend legendary photographer, historian, lecturer and photojournalist Ernest C. Withers, Sr. and congratulate him on receiving the University of Memphis Black Student Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

WHEREAS, the real strength of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was the thousands of men and women who bravely rallied to the cause of justice and put their lives on the line to do what was right; and

WHEREAS, Ernest C. Withers, Sr., who produced a very eloquent and passionate body of testimony through the lens of his camera, was certainly one of them, an integral component in the machinery of the civil rights struggle; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers was born August 7, 1922 and has been making photographs for more than 60 years, with subjects including individuals and groups and the events they create for themselves--- the celebrations, social events, political gatherings and groupings that are the mile markers of personal and group histories; and

WHEREAS, he began his illustrious career as a photographer when he was 14 and a student at Manassas High School, in Memphis, and his identification as a civil rights photographer began with his coverage of the Emmett Till trial of two white men who were acquitted by an all-white male jury; and

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WHEREAS, Mr. Withers started by developing film in the bathroom of his home in 1946, and, after becoming one of the original nine black officers hired by the city in 1948, opened his first of several Beale Street studios above the Palace Theater; and

WHEREAS, unlike many other photojournalists of the period, he was a participant in the Civil Rights Movement, not just an observer, and often went unpaid for his work; and

WHEREAS, he did do paid assignments for the historic *Tri-State Defender*, the *Memphis World* and the *Chicago Defender*, and his photographs were widely used in *Time*, *Life* and *Newsweek*, although they often appeared uncredited ; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers also was an important chronicler of the transition and development of B. B. King, Bobby Blue Bland, Johnny Ace, Earl Forest, Elvis Presley, Roscoe Gordon, and a number of people in the Hippodrome, the Club Handy, and the Mitchell Hotel; and

WHEREAS, he has photographed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and eight United States presidents, ranging from Eisenhower to Clinton; and

WHEREAS, there are currently four traveling exhibits of Mr. Withers work: *Letters March On*, out of Massachusetts; *Appeal to the Ages*, out of New York; *Good Times in Memphis* and *Negro Baseball*, out of Boston; and *I'm a Man*, a portfolio sold in museums across the country; and

WHEREAS, known affectionately as the “walking history book”, he is also a widely sought speaker at churches, colleges, universities and special events; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers is a lifelong member of Gospel Temple Baptist Church; and

WHEREAS, Ernest C. Withers, Sr. was inducted into the Black Press Hall of Fame in 1988 and in December 1995, the building in which his studio is located was dedicated and named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Withers was recently honored by the University of Memphis Black Student Association, as a recipient of that august body's prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award; and

WHEREAS, he and his wife, Dorothy, have been married for more than half a century and this joyful marriage has produced eight children and 12 grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that we pause to specially recognize a man who has meant so much to the Civil Rights Movement and to Shelby County; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE-HUNDREDTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we honor and commend Ernest C. Withers, Sr., on this latest honor and wish him well in his future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.

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